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Cary, AUGUSTINE'S INVENTION OF INNER SELF: THE LEGACY OF A CHRISTIAN PLATONIST

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NOTES

1. Timothy O'Connor, "Agent Causation," in *Agents, Causes & Events*, ed. by Timothy O'Connor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 186.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. What follows in this paragraph is a shortened version of a critique of O'Connor's view that I presented in "Failed Solutions to a Standard Libertarian Problem," *Philosophical Studies* 90 (1998): 237-244.
5. See my "A Noncausal Theory of Agency," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 49 (1988): 303-316; and "Libertarian Choice," *Faith and Philosophy* 14 (1997): 195-211.
6. See the papers referred to in endnote 5.
7. I want to thank Andrei Buckareff and William Hasker for reading this review and making helpful comments.

Augustine's Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist. By Phillip Cary. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Pp. xviii + 214. $45 (cloth).

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This book is an essay in intellectual history, an enterprise that its author understands, largely following Alasdair MacIntyre, as an attempt to trace the trajectory of a tradition through time. Such trajectories, Cary thinks, are produced by the handing on of intellectual materials (texts, concepts, modes of argument, epistemological and ontological commitments) from one generation to the next, and by the attempt of those whose thought moves within the bounds of some tradition or other to deal with the problems raised by that tradition for itself, and those produced for it by its interaction with what is alien to it.

Cary deals in this book with a particular episode in the history of the tradition of Christian thought, so understood. It is, as he presents it, a dramatic episode, one in which the inner self is for the first time explicitly presented as a space in which explorations can be undertaken and discoveries made, a space the exploration of which is essential for the closer and fuller understanding of God. This is what Cary calls the "invention" of the inner self. In so calling it he plays upon the range of meanings to be found in the Latin *invenire*: finding, discovery, creation, construction. The poet 'invents' his tropes and images; the *rhetor* preparing a speech 'invents' his periods and 'discovers' his authorities; and the philosopher faced with a difficulty 'finds' his concepts and 'constructs' his arguments—all this is suggested by *invenire*, and by using the term Cary does not mean to suggest that the 'invention' of the idea that the self is inner space should be understood in such a way as to deny that the self's inner space was also discovered (found) by Augustine. Cary does in fact think that Augustine's invention was an unfortunate one from a Christian point of view; but his goal in the book is neither to defend nor to explain any such view, but rather to show

how Christians (at least in the Latin-using West) came to think it obvious that there is indeed an inner self, and to think their thoughts about what we are in terms of such an idea.

The episode investigated by Cary, in some considerable detail, is the development of Augustine's thought from the time of his conversion to the writing of the *Confessions*—which is to say, roughly the last fifteen years of the fourth century. There are occasional references forward to the mature Augustine's thought, but the focus of Cary's interest does not lie there: he wants to show just how and just why Augustine came to think that the self is an inner space, and that development took place, he thinks, between the writing of the early dialogues at Cassiciacum in 386-387, and the composition of the *Confessions* in 397-400. The story he tells (and it is told with the verve and excitement of the sleuth on the trail of a criminal) is of an Augustine puzzled by how to understand the nature of the self and its relation to God, and of his several attempts to bring together the tools for thought given him by Platonism (more specifically by Plotinus) with his specifically Christian (and increasingly biblical) commitments in order to provide an answer to that question.

Cary begins by sketching the movement of Plato's thought from the early aporetic dialogues to the later analysis of the conditions of the possibility of Socratic conceptual questioning. The Platonic move of importance here, he suggests, is the mature Plato's understanding of the soul as eternally capable of entering into the vision of the intelligible forms, a vision that is changelessly beautiful. This understanding of the soul is taken up (mediated in part through Aristotle's claim that the soul is what it contemplates, and therefore is divine) and developed by Plotinus, who relates it to a view of the cosmos as divided into concentric spheres. At the center is the eternal point, the divine one, changeless, undifferentiated, unextended. Circling around this is the sphere of the forms, also eternal but internally differentiable (at least conceptually), and eternally contemplated by the divine mind. Then comes the sphere of embodied souls, capable of looking inward to the forms and to the one, and as a result capable also of becoming like them; but capable also of looking outward to the multiplicity of particular material things, and as a result of becoming like them, changeable, divided, temporal, and subject to death. It was this view, according to Cary, that Augustine had to learn and meditate upon in order to be able to given a Christian account of the nature of the soul and its relation to God.

The Plotinian picture, in Cary's view, is the one before Augustine as he composed the *Confessions* more than a decade after his conversion. For Cary it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the *Confessions* (together with most of Augustine's work preceding it) is an extended Christian gloss on Plotinus. This view is not held by all scholars of Augustine. It remains unclear whether Augustine read Plotinus at all (though he probably did), and still more unclear just what of Plotinus he read. It's notable that Cary's emphasis upon the particular importance of Plotinus to Augustine requires him rest a good deal upon a textually dubious reference to the *libri Plotini* ('books of Plotinus') in Augustine's early treatise *De Beata Vita*, where he mentions the books that were of importance to him in the summer of 386 as he prepared for his baptism. But the vast majority of manuscripts of this

work read not *libri Plotini* but *libri Platonis* ('books of the Platonists'), as Cary acknowledges; and while Cary's reading is certainly possible, it isn't as obviously correct as he makes it seem. I mention this only to indicate by example that Cary's emphasis upon Augustine's knowledge of the particulars of Plotinus' system is overdone; I don't mean thereby to call into question the basic thesis. It is entirely clear that Augustine's conceptual armory is broadly Platonist and to some extent Plotinian. But it would be exegetically possible (and desirable) to alter the emphasis in Cary's account by giving more importance than he does to Augustine's attention to biblical exegesis during the period under investigation, perhaps even to the extent of making it the main engine of Augustine's thought. Close reading of (for example) *Confessions* 1.18.28 might provide a useful case study: here Augustine weaves together echoes of Plotinus (perhaps provided him from Porphyry or from some other digest of Plotinian ideas) with the parable of the Prodigal Son. Is what he says to be understood as a Plotinian reading of Luke, or as a biblical reading of Middle Platonism? A decision for the latter would alter a good deal in the emphasis of Cary's account, but it would leave standing his main point, which is that Augustine's understanding of the soul can't be explained without looking at its broadly Platonist underpinnings and commitments.

Augustine, then, comes to think of the soul as capable of knowing God by looking inward. This, says Cary, makes God fundamentally or essentially intelligible (as were the forms for Plato), and this view separates Augustine from most Jews and many Christians before and after him, who were not prepared to attribute essential intelligibility to God. Above all, the view separates Augustine from Aquinas on the question of nature and grace: for if the soul is naturally such that it can see, know, and understand God (which is, on Cary's reading, Augustine's view, at least at the end of the fourth century), then special grace is not needed for this, and a distinction fundamental to much Catholic and some Protestant thought falls away. The view also calls into question what Cary calls the necessity of Christ's flesh, whether in the incarnation or the eucharist. For if God can in essentials be known by the introspective soul, and if knowing God is what constitutes the proper end of the soul, then the flesh of Christ can have only contingent relevance for the salvation of humans. This, in Cary's view, is a dubiously orthodox position, and he rightly mentions its importance for Catholic controversies of the past century about 'ontologism' (are we naturally—ontologically—such that we can see and know God?), and about the importance of the (perhaps quasi-Jansenist) views of the nature-grace distinction associated by some with the advocates of 'la nouvelle theologie' in France around the middle of the twentieth century.

The central question here is: how should the soul's relation to God be understood by Christians? Augustine is driven, on Cary's account, by a deeply Plotinian need to affirm the soul's kinship to God by way of its immortality and its capacity to see and know God's essence, on the one hand; and by his need to affirm that sin provides a barrier to our understanding of and intimacy with God, and to provide an analysis of the nature of that barrier, on the other. The second need was not finally met until Augustine was forced to it by the Pelagians, in a series of works composed

more than twenty years after those treated by Cary in this book. What Augustine came to see by the end of the fourth century, according to Cary, is that in spite of the *imago Dei*, the deep kinship of the soul to God, God must always be *praeter animam*, other than and beyond the soul. God can be looked for in the inner space of the soul, a space which is in some sense infinite (the exploration of memory reveals no end to its capacities) and in some sense everlasting (it will have no end in time), but which is not identical to God. This picture of the soul, given in its most gorgeous literary form in the tenth book of the *Confessions*, is what Cary means by Augustine's invention of the inner self. The doctrine of sin is still not fully developed, but Augustine has moved sufficiently far from (for example) the *Soliloquies* of 387, that he no longer makes the soul and God necessarily co-existent. The inner self is a place in which God's traces may be found, an extended metaphor for God; but it is no longer a place identical in essence with God, nor a place inseparable from God.

This book is not the work of a philosopher with precise and analytical tastes. Its principal value does not lie in the drawing of careful distinctions or the offering of coercive and complex arguments. It is nonetheless a valuable and important book, both for those interested in Augustine's thought, and for those wanting, as Augustine wanted, to think Christian thoughts about matters of philosophical interest. For the former, Cary's analysis of Augustine's Plotinianism will no doubt provide fertile ground for future discussion. For the latter, his richly textured depiction of how a particular Christian at a particular time—Augustine at the end of the fourth century—actually thought, has some important lessons to teach. Augustine wanted to think as a Christian, to think Christian thoughts about the materials (biblical, creedal, liturgical, conceptual) provided him by the church, handed down to him by the tradition. But he found that the tradition did not provide him with everything he needed in order to think Christian thoughts about the nature of the soul, and so he was pressed by his conversion to study Platonism more deeply than before precisely in order to find what he needed. This is a portrayal of the intellectual situation of every Christian thinker; it ought to be immediately recognizable and nourishing to readers of this journal, and it may also serve as a corrective to those who want to think Christian thoughts but who take themselves to have no need of the gold of the Egyptians (Exodus 3:21-22, 12:35-36) in order to do so.

Warranted Christian Belief, by **Alvin Plantinga**, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2000 ISBN 0-190513192-4 — 0-19-513193-2(pbk) pp. xx + 508. $60.00 (hardcover), $24.95 (paperback).

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This is the eagerly awaited sequel to Plantinga's two earlier books on epistemology, *Warrant: The Current Debate* and *Warrant and Proper Function.* This one is, however, about the rational acceptability of Christian belief, and is rooted firmly in Christian tradition, following such apparently dis-